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ABSTRACT

The Book Club Project of the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects is a 3-year line of research exploring the intersection of literature-based reading instruction and the role of student-led response groups. This work is in response to a current trend of creating authentic literacy opportunities in classrooms, reading original literature rather than stories with controlled vocabulary, and reading entire selections rather than excerpts. The research was a collaborative effort among senior researchers, graduate assistants, and classroom teachers to explore the issues related to literature-based instruction, and to create a meaningful environment in which students' abilities both to read and to talk about literature and related topics would be enhanced. The broadest question was: How might literature-based instruction be created to encompass instruction in both comprehension and literature response? This question spawned a number of related questions, including the following: What is the nature of classroom talk and students' perceptions about discussion? What are the interrelationships among reading, writing, and talk? What characterizes literature-based instruction and discussion in nonmainstream classrooms? Perhaps the most important result from the studies to date is the information learned about students' understandings about literacy. Reading became more than a place to read silently, say all the words right, and correctly answer the questions. (Eleven figures and extensive transcriptions of student discussions are included; 41 references are attached.) (Author/RS)

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Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects

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College of Education

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Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects

The **Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects** was awarded to Michigan State University in 1987 after a nationwide competition. Funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, the Elementary Subjects Center is a major project housed in the Institute for Research on Teaching (IRT). The program focuses on conceptual understanding, higher order thinking, and problem solving in elementary school teaching of mathematics, science, social studies, literature, and the arts. Center researchers are identifying exemplary curriculum, instruction, and evaluation practices in the teaching of these school subjects; studying these practices to build new hypotheses about how the effectiveness of elementary schools can be improved; testing these hypotheses through school-based research; and making specific recommendations for the improvement of school policies, instructional materials, assessment procedures, and teaching practices. Research questions include, What content should be taught when teaching these subjects for understanding and use of knowledge? How do teachers concentrate their teaching to use their limited resources best? and In what ways is good teaching subject matter- specific?

The work is designed to unfold in three phases, beginning with literature review and interview studies designed to elicit and synthesize the points of view of various stakeholders (representatives of the underlying academic disciplines, intellectual leaders and organizations concerned with curriculum and instruction in school subjects, classroom teachers, state- and district-level policymakers) concerning ideal curriculum, instruction, and evaluation practices in these five content areas at the elementary level. Phase II involves interview and observation methods designed to describe current practice, and in particular, best practice as observed in the classrooms of teachers believed to be outstanding. Phase II also involves analysis of curricula (both widely used curriculum series and distinctive curricula developed with special emphasis on conceptual understanding and higher order applications), as another approach to gathering information about current practices. In Phase III, models of ideal practice will be developed, based on what has been learned and synthesized from the first two phases, and will be tested through classroom intervention studies.

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Abstract

The Book Club Project of the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects is a three-year line of research exploring the intersection of literature-based reading instruction and the role of student-led response groups. This work is in response to a current trend of creating authentic literacy opportunities in our classrooms, reading original literature rather than stories with controlled vocabulary, and reading entire selections rather than excerpts. The research was a collaborative effort among senior researchers, graduate assistants, and classroom teachers to explore the issues related to literature-based instruction, and to create a meaningful environment in which students' abilities both to read and to talk about literature and related topics would be enhanced.

Our broadest question was, How might literature-based instruction be created to encompass instruction in both comprehension and literature response? This question spawned a number of related questions, including the following: What is the nature of classroom talk and students' perceptions about discussion? What are the interrelationships among reading, writing, and talk? What characterizes literature-based instruction and discussion in nonmainstream classrooms?

In this paper, we present an overview of the theoretical foundations of the Book Club Project; describe the nature of the Book Club literacy instructional program; and discuss what we have learned in terms of the nature of students' talk during Book Club and their perceptions about the Book Club program, relationships among the language arts (i.e., reading, writing, and oral discussion), and issues related to extensions of the Book Club approach to nontraditional classrooms.

READING INSTRUCTION RECONSIDERED: LITERATURE AND DISCUSSION IN THE READING PROGRAM

Taffy E. Raphael, Susan I. McMahon, Virginia J. Goatley, Jessica L. Bentley, Fenice B. Boyd, Laura S. Pardo, and Deborah A. Woodman[1]

The history of literacy instruction dates back to ancient Greeks who created the alphabet that has served as a basis for much of western written literacy. Early instruction focused on memorizing letters and syllables, reflecting a belief that learning to read was relatively easy (Mathews, 1966). Mathews writes that "in old Athens, there was a saying of one who was missing that he was either dead or had become a schoolmaster and was accordingly ashamed to appear in polite society . . . [because] an institution of the lowest order [was] a reading and writing school" (p. 9). Instruction over the next few thousand years certainly changed a great deal, though in the last several decades, we too have focused on "saying the words right," "breaking the code," and "finding the right answer" after reading text. Happily, we have continued evolving in understanding the complexities of literacy instruction and the relationship among the language arts--reading, writing, and discussion. A current trend in literacy instruction is particularly noteworthy: creating authentic literacy opportunities in our classrooms, reading original literature rather than stories with controlled vocabulary, and reading entire selections rather than excerpts.

When reading was considered primarily a process of decoding, it made sense to emphasize in instruction the words frequently encountered in print and the sound/symbol relationships that make up our language. With comprehension as a primary goal, it made sense to emphasize strategies such as predicting or identifying the central theme in a story to help readers

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[1]Taffy E. Raphael, professor of teacher education at Michigan State University, is a senior researcher in the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects where she codirects the Book Club Project. Susan I. McMahon, currently an assistant professor of teacher education at University of Wisconsin, Madison, was codirector of the Project. Virginia J. Goatley, a doctoral candidate in educational psychology at MSU, is a research assistant with the Project. Jessica L. Bentley, a master's candidate in literacy at MSU, is a research assistant with the Project. Fenice B. Boyd, a doctoral candidate in teacher education at MSU, is a research assistant with the Project. Laura S. Pardo is a fifth-grade teacher at Allen Street School in Lansing, Michigan. Deborah A. Woodman is a fourth/fifth-grade teacher at Allen Street School.

understand the meaning of the text. Now, however, as we move toward literature-based instruction, we must also consider the reader and the importance of a current debate amongst literacy critics.

Harker (1987) describes the century-old question concerning the source of the meaning associated with any given selection: Since the 1930s, theories of literature (e.g., Welleck & Warren, 1956) suggest "the text as the carrier of meaning and a corresponding insistence on limiting the reader's role to explicating this meaning . . . through close textual analysis" (Harker, 1987, p. 242). Thus, literature instruction focused on learning the "correct" interpretation, understanding how texts were structured and how they communicated their meaning. More recently, reader response criticism has favored emphasizing the readers' experiences as the source of meaning (e.g., Fish, 1970; Iser, 1978). In effect, these views support what Rosenblatt (1936; 1978) has argued for years, that reading is a transaction between reader and text, transforming both, but influenced by the readers' interpretations.

Beliefs about the importance of the reader in literature response call into question current satisfaction with comprehension as our instructional goal. The explosion of research (see reviews by Pearson & Fielding, 1991; Tierney & Cunningham, 1984), edited volumes (e.g., Duffy, Roehler, & Mason, 1984; Flood, 1984a, b; Santa & Hayes, 1981), and texts (e.g., Cooper, 1986; Pearson & Johnson, 1978) has provided important insights into how readers identify important information contained in the text. Yet, researchers remain relatively mute in terms of the reader's role except as related to background knowledge and comprehension strategies.

If we take seriously current views of where meaning resides, we must reconsider even our best practices of comprehension instruction. Teaching students to predict or to identify a central theme seems to presuppose that there is meaning *in the text* and students need to develop strategies to "get" this meaning. If this is our focus, we fall short of providing students with the kind of literate environment in which *their* voices, as well as the author's, may be heard. Thus, in addition to our current practice of helping students learn basic sight word vocabulary,

sound/symbol relationships, and comprehension strategies, we must help students develop their abilities to respond to the text in a variety of ways, to add their voices to the community in which a text and its author(s) have been introduced. The key is to broaden and provide balance in our literacy instruction overall. In this paper, we explore the bases for this position and related changes in the way we approach reading instruction, focusing on the Book Club research project, a three-year research agenda at Michigan State University.

Book Club: A Research Agenda

Against the backdrop of the debates previously described, we began the Book Club Project. Our broadest question was, How might literature-based instruction be created to encompass instruction in both comprehension and literature response? This question spawned a number of related questions, including the following: What is the nature of classroom talk and students' perceptions about discussion? What are the interrelationships among reading, writing, and talk? What characterizes literature-based instruction and discussion in nonmainstream classrooms?

We began with pilot work in two fourth grades in a university community school. The pilot involved creating book clubs *in addition to* the regular basal reading program. Students met twice a week on two subsequent days, for an hour each time, to discuss chapter and picture books first around a war theme, followed by a survival theme. As a result of the pilot, we made several decisions about the nature of the Book Club instruction that would be necessary when we began the full study. The first set of decisions involved the need to integrate Book Club within the reading program of the classroom, while the second set involved the instructional focus.

First, we noticed that when Book Club instruction was conceptualized as an add-on to the existing basal reading program there were several potential difficulties. For example, meeting only twice a week appeared to create a sense of discontinuity from one week to the next. Much of the time spent on the first day of the week was devoted to a review of what had occurred during the previous week. Students who had read sections of the books the previous week often had to take much time to "get back into" the material they had already read. Another problem also

related to time: With the Book Club operating only two days a week, we found that there was often not enough time to have students read and write to prepare for their Book Clubs and related large-group discussions. Thus, students often came to their Book Clubs without having had adequate time to process or reflect upon the ideas they had read.

Further, we were concerned by the mixed messages that we seemed to be sending about reading. During "reading" in class, students learned that the goal was to read and do the related curricular materials, while during Book Club, the goal was to discuss books. We felt this arrangement undermined both programs--students clearly needed to see their reading program as a place where they had opportunities to read, share, and enjoy their stories. In turn, students needed to understand that during Book Club, it was important to read and understand the ideas in their books.

The second set of decisions from the pilot study related to what we learned from analyzing transcripts of students' discussions and the related field notes. We identified two areas of knowledge that seemed important to students' growth in their ability to read, comprehend, and interact with and about text: knowledge about *what* to discuss and *how* to discuss it. The development of an instructional program that would support students' growth in these two areas was the focus of the second year.

The researchers and the teachers who joined the project for the second year agreed that the Book Club instructional program in year two would become, on a trial basis, the literacy program in their classrooms. In the second year of the research program, the project directors, Sue McMahon and Taffy Raphael were joined by three research assistants, Jessie Bentley, Fenice Boyd, and Ginny Goatley, and two upper elementary school teachers, Laura Pardo and Deb Woodman.[2] We made a commitment to create a literacy environment in Laura's

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[2] The teachers participating in the first year of the project decided, for personal reasons, not to participate in the second year. They had team taught for several years. When one teacher was awarded the opportunity to teach in Taiwan, the other teacher decided to focus that year on having a self-contained classroom for the first time in years. Thus, the site for year two changed to an urban community school with two new participating teachers.

fifth-grade and Deb's fourth/fifth-grade classrooms in an urban neighborhood school, using high-quality children's literature and teaching students strategies for both comprehending the selections and interacting with their peers about what they had read. We met weekly and developed a series of units based on themes (e.g., war) and genres (e.g., folktale, biography). We generated ideas for helping students develop strategies that could (a) support their reading (e.g., character mapping, comparing and contrasting, and critiquing), (b) help develop personal response (e.g., feelings associated with the reading experience), and (c) facilitate related talk about text (e.g., how to listen, take turns, and build upon each other's ideas). We struggled with how to relate students' success and areas for growth to parents and administrators in a district with traditional report cards and parent conferences.

As the second year draws to a close and we look to our third year, we are considering questions related to follow-up: how teachers and students draw on their experiences as they move into new contexts. Some of the students will continue in Book Club, others will move to different classrooms within the school, while still others will move to the middle school. What aspects of the program do Deb and Laura maintain as they begin with a new group of students? How will students who have had Book Club work with those who have not? How might some of the knowledge of strategies for reading and for talk relate to students' learning and discussion in content areas? These are among the questions yet to be pursued.

What Is Book Club?

Book Club encompasses a four-component program designed to help students develop abilities in both *what* to share about the literature they read and *how* to share it (Raphael, Goatley, McMahon, & Woodman, in press). Book Clubs, small student-led discussion groups of three to six students, were the central focus of the program and the basis for the name of the entire intervention. The Book Club intervention included the following: (a) reading, (b) writing, (c) discussion (i.e., Book Club & Community Share), and (d) instruction (see Figure 1). Though all components interacted to support each other and to develop students' abilities to

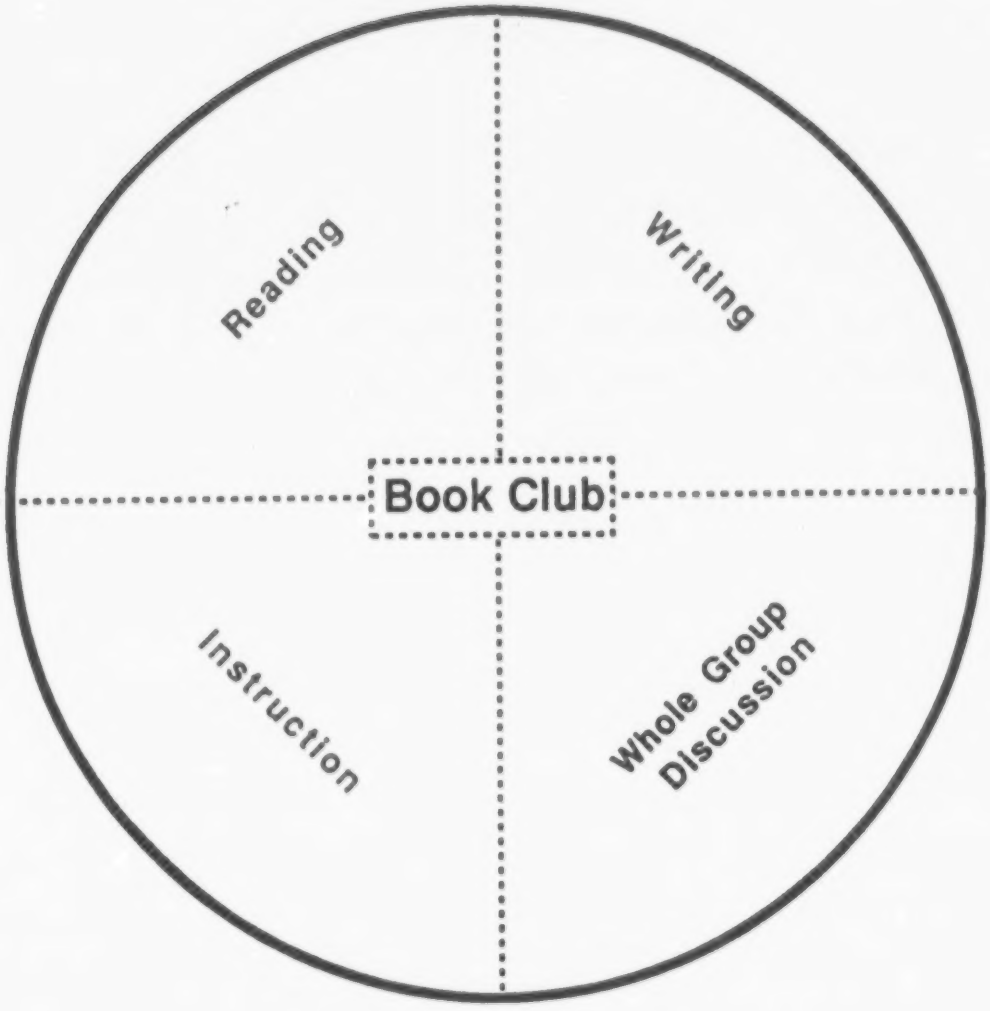

Figure 1. Book Club components.

both comprehend and respond to their selections, we will describe each in turn, followed by a description of related changes in accountability procedures.

The Book Club Components

Reading. Reading was a central component since it was essential to engage in later discussion about a selection. The teachers provided different opportunities for students to read, depending upon the difficulty of the selection, the amount of background knowledge students had, and the amount of support they needed. Opportunities included silent reading, partner reading, choral reading, oral reading/listening, and reading at home.

Writing. Writing was a second important component for students' preparation for and reflections on Book Club discussions. Two kinds of curricular materials, reading logs and think-sheets were developed to encourage students' writing to reflect on what they had read. First, a reading log was used instead of traditional workbook activities. It consisted of blank pages for representing ideas through pictures, charts, and maps and lined pages that could be adapted for writing reflections about elements such as story events and characters, interesting words and language used by the author, favorite dialogue and descriptions, and so forth. Thus, writing was interpreted broadly to include various forms of representing ideas in print or pictorial fashion.

Initially, the teachers introduced and modeled different ways the reading logs could be used, often assigning a particular activity that seemed relevant to that day's reading. For example, when students read *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* (Coerr, 1977), Deb wanted students to "get to know Sadako" as a real person with many different characteristics. Since students had earlier in the year been introduced to character maps and Deb thought such an activity was relevant to the story, she asked them to create one of Sadako as a way to record what they had learned about her (see Figure 2).

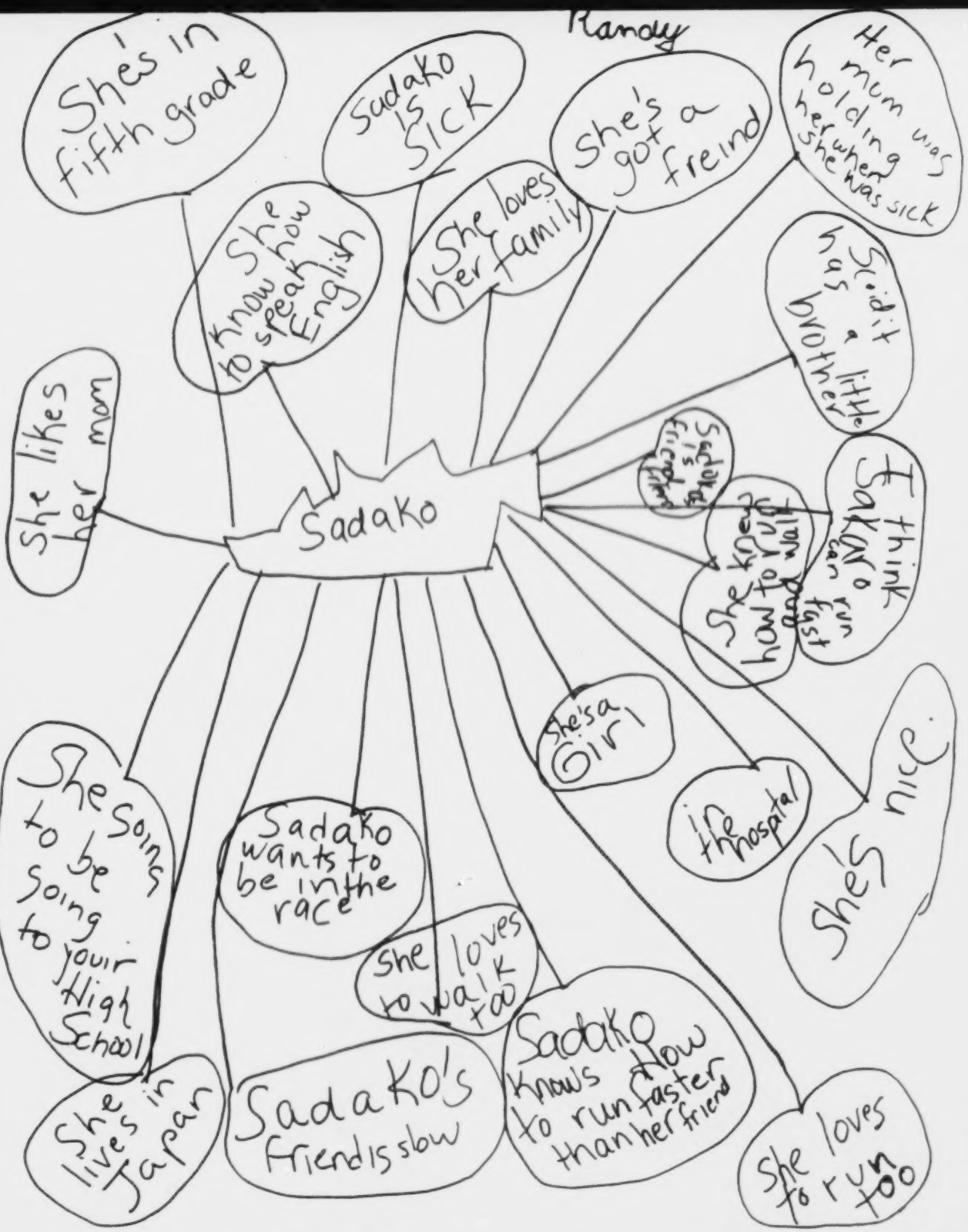
Randy
Sadako
She's in fifth grade
Sadako is sick
She's got a freind
Her mum was holding her when she was sick
She know how to speak English
She loves her family
She likes her mom
Scott has a little brother
Scott is cute
I think Sakaro can run fast
She knows how to run and walk
She's a Girl
In the hospital
She's nice
She going to be going to your High School
Sadako wants to be in the race
She loves to walk too
She lives in Japan
Sadako's friend is slow
Sadako knows How to run faster than her friend
She loves to run too

Figure 2. Randy's character map of Sadako.

Later in the book, Deb was concerned that students understood the main events that had occurred in the first five chapters, to make sure they were prepared for the chapters that followed. After introducing students to the concept of sequencing ideas, using a series of boxes as might be seen in a comic strip, she asked them to create a sequence of drawings to convey the story's events. Randy's reading log page from October 8 illustrates his representation of the sequence of events from the first five chapters of *Sadako* (see Figure 3).

Logs were also used as a place for students to reflect on issues that they thought were important. After the class had read three books related to World War II and Japan, Deb suggested that the students might want to consider what they had learned about war from each of the three books. Randy's November 7 entry reflects his growing sophistication. In his own words, he wrote about what he had learned from reading the different books, including, "I didn't know that war was bad. Because I didn't know that bomb was going to be dropped. It just thought they had the war with scords, guns . . . I didn't know that many animals would die over a bomb."[3]

In addition to the reading logs, other writing activities involved the use of think-sheets, a term coined by Raphael and Englert (1990) to describe guides that can be used to prompt students' thinking and note taking--notes that become a basis for later discussion. The think-sheets contrast from worksheets that are typically completed by individuals to practice taught skills, turned in to the teacher for grading, and are rarely used as a basis for discussion. One think-sheet used frequently, especially when beginning a new book, was a "Stepping Into" (vis-à-vis Langer, 1990) think-sheet in which students thought about the world they would be "stepping into" as they read the book and made a prediction about the story. Randy's Stepping Into think-sheet on October 23, prior to reading *Hiroshima No Pika* (Maruki, 1980), reflects his personal interest in and hopes about reading about African-Americans as well as his sense that there would likely be links between the new book and the ones about war they had recently completed (see Figure 4).

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[3] All student writing is included with original spelling and grammatical conventions. Pseudonyms are used for student names.

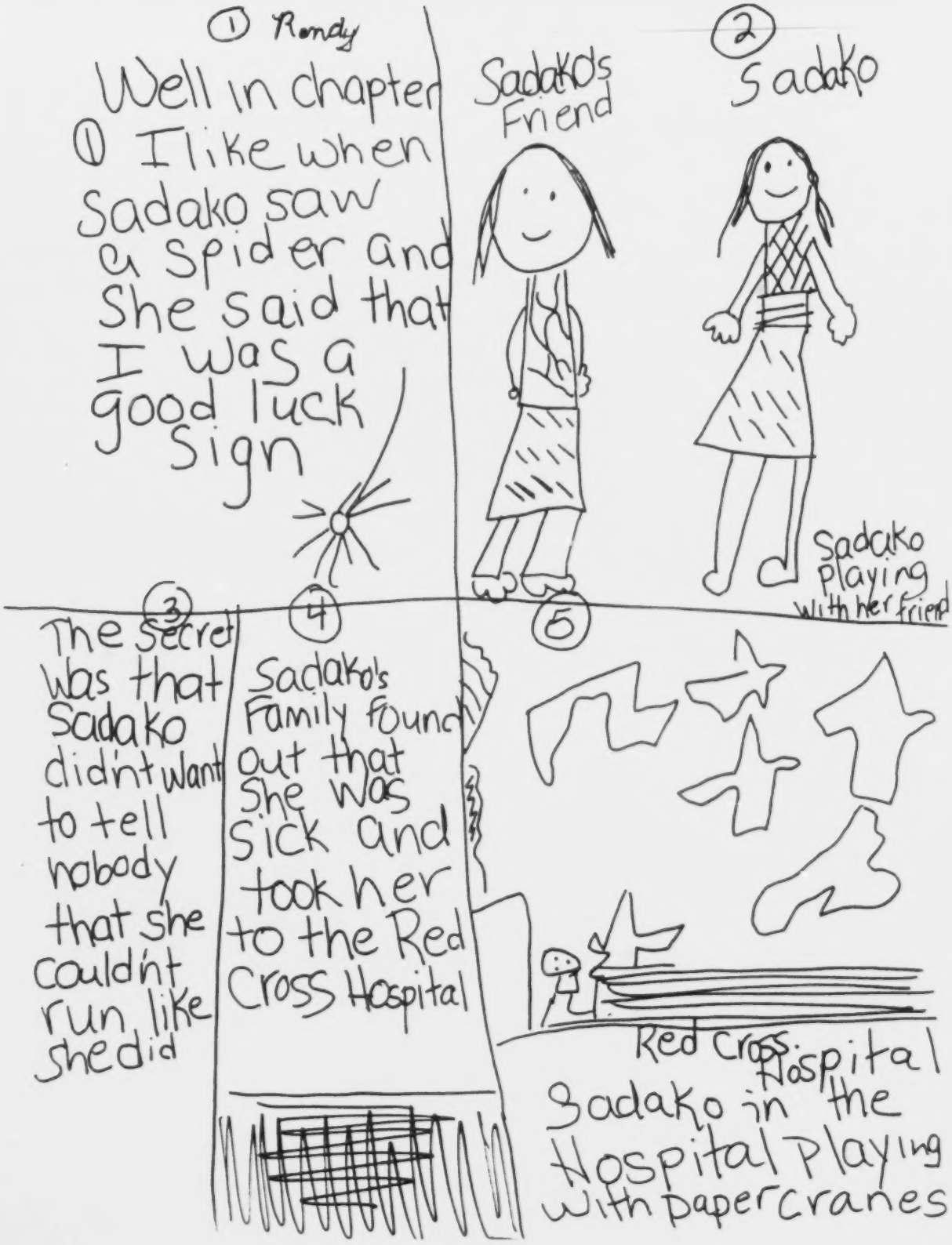
① Randy
Well in chapter ① I like when Sadako saw a spider and She said that I was a good luck sign
Sadako's Friend
② Sadako
Sadako playing with her friend
③ The secret was that Sadako didn't want to tell nobody that she couldn't run like she did
④ Sadako's Family found out that She was sick and took her to the Red Cross Hospital
⑤
Red Cross Hospital
Sadako in the Hospital Playing with paper cranes

Figure 3. Randy's sequence chart of the first five chapters of *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*.

NAME Randy DATE _____

Stepping Into
Making Predictions

Well I think that the book Hiroshima-NO Pika is going to be about African People. Because the title and the Picture on the front Cover looks like African people And this story could be true Or it could be true about Some of the people in Africa

And probably why the people droped the atom bong* Well Because it was into a War.

Figure 4. Randy's Stepping Into think-sheet prior to reading *Hiroshima No Pika.*

A second frequently emphasized area of written response was critique. Laura and Deb often used the Stepping Out think-sheet for a book critique, both to model how to critique with the whole group and to provide students with basic prompts for their own individual critique and group discussions. Students learned to think in terms of *why* they liked or did not like a particular book and to move beyond merely saying "it was good, I liked it" to providing specific reasons. Randy wrote a critique of *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* on October 17, commenting that the author had been successful in describing war in terms of Sadako's death, yet needed to size additional information about what the story was based on, since it didn't "blend out [of] the story" (see Figure 5).

A third area of writing often emphasized through instruction was discourse synthesis (Raphael & Boyd, 1991; Spivey & King, 1989), or the bringing together of information from multiple sources to create a new text. For example, students engaged in a series of writing activities that illustrated the relationship among the three books read for the World War II and Japan unit, building up to writing an essay on the theme they selected that related to the unit. Deb modeled through her own talk and elicitation from the students how each of the books, while different, addressed some similar topics or themes. A Stepping Out think-sheet supported her modeling and was then used by students for their own brainstorming of possible topics and the single topic they wished to pursue. Figure 6 presents Randy's written responses on the think-sheet from November 5, used as a basis for a student-led discussion group later the same day.

On November 7, students wrote, using a related think-sheet to prompt their sustained writing. Figure 7 reflects how Randy was able to pursue his theme about how bombs can hurt. The effect of the integration of the instruction, writing, reading, and discussion can be seen in his relative sophistication, as he notes that "Bombs just didn't hurt, but *the fear of the bomb* being dropped" [italics added]. As a result of the various writing activities in the reading logs and think-sheets, students eventually were in a position to select what they wanted to do in their logs. Laura and Deb used the map shown in Figure 8 as a guide for students who at any time

NAME Randy DATE _____

Stepping Out

Book "Critique"

I plan to critique (plot, character, setting?) Character

What are some things the author did well?

Well some of the things that the author did Well was Was talk about Sadako died. Because that Was one of the main parts.

What are some things the author could do to improve the story?

The Author could of tell more about the Was based on because I desint Bend out the Story.

Figure 5. Randy's Stepping Out think-sheet of a book critique for *Sadako*.

NAME _____ DATE _____

Stepping Out

BRINGING IDEAS TOGETHER

Topics that Sadako, Hiroshima No Pika, and Faithful Elephants make me think about are:

War
Japan
People dying
peopl getting Radiation)
People and animals
Sadness
Why people fight
Bomb
Japanese

The topic I want to share about is:

The War
Pg 1 and Randall

because and Well I want to know why did we have the War Because all of this fighting really doesn't make any Sense and I feel so sad because people are dying from this

Figure 6. Randy's Stepping Out think-sheet for identifying themes.

NAME _____ DATE _____

STEPPING OUT
BRINGING IDEAS TOGETHER

My Topic

from SADAKO The meaning of paper cranes
War- atom Bomb hurt people
the Bomb affected Sadako's Grandmother
Japan life in Japan.

from HIROSHIMA What the Bomb can do to
people lives. Bombs covered
many areas Bombs can
burn peoples bodies.
bombs can hurt people weeks
after it happened.

from FAITHFUL ELEPHANTS Bombs hurt animals
animals. Animals Were buried
How elephant lived, The Bomb
was dropped in Japan Sadness
Bombs, just didn't hurt-But the
fear of the bomb being dropped.

Figure 7. Randy's Stepping Out think-sheet for supporting themes.

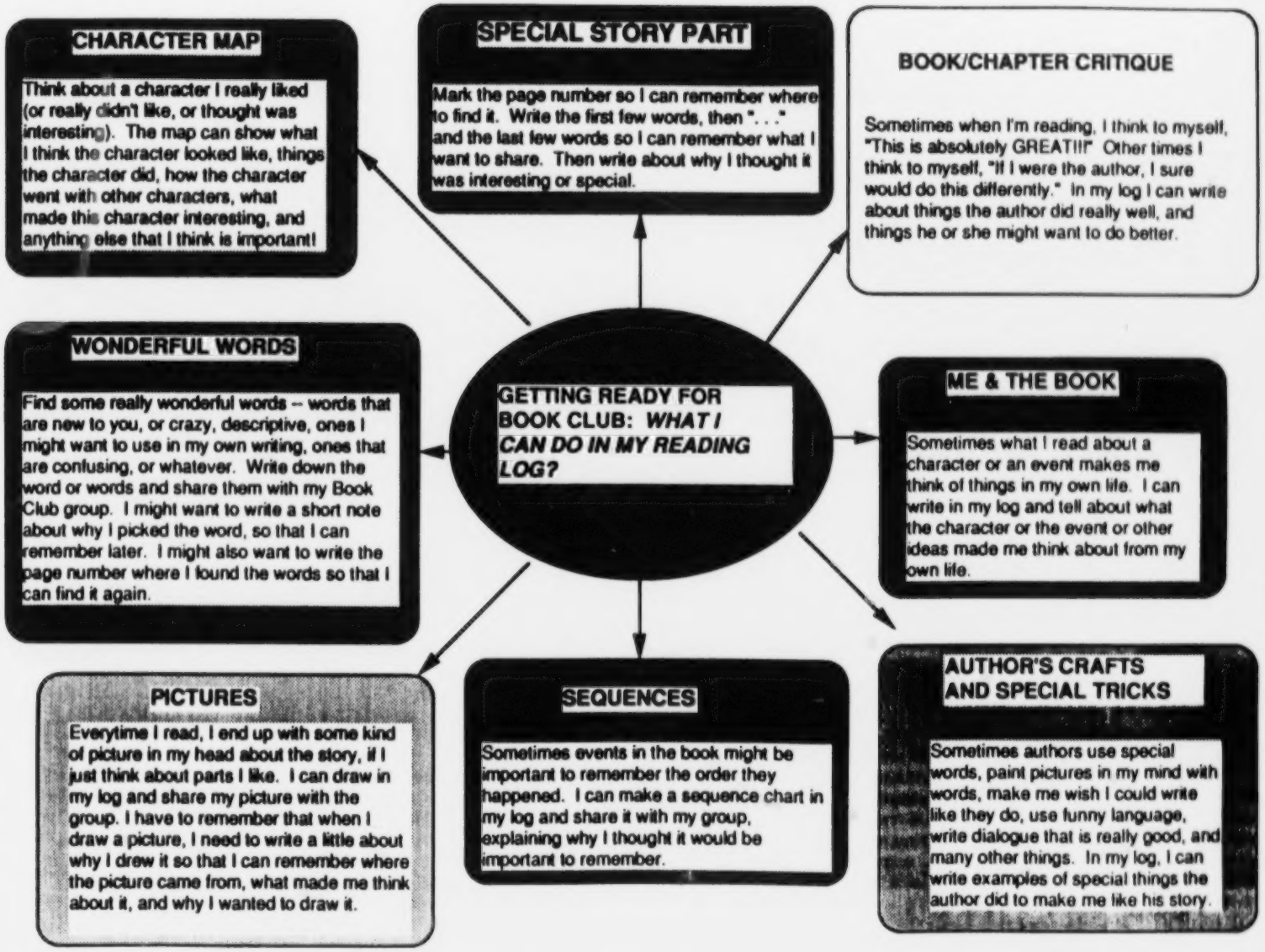
CHARACTER MAP
Think about a character I really liked (or really didn't like, or thought was interesting). The map can show what I think the character looked like, things the character did, how the character went with other characters, what made this character interesting, and anything else that I think is important!
SPECIAL STORY PART
Mark the page number so I can remember where to find it. Write the first few words, then ". . ." and the last few words so I can remember what I want to share. Then write about why I thought it was interesting or special.
BOOK/CHAPTER CRITIQUE
Sometimes when I'm reading, I think to myself, "This is absolutely GREAT!!!" Other times I think to myself, "If I were the author, I sure would do this differently." In my log I can write about things the author did really well, and things he or she might want to do better.
WONDERFUL WORDS
Find some really wonderful words -- words that are new to you, or crazy, descriptive, ones I might want to use in my own writing, ones that are confusing, or whatever. Write down the word or words and share them with my Book Club group. I might want to write a short note about why I picked the word, so that I can remember later. I might also want to write the page number where I found the words so that I can find it again.
GETTING READY FOR BOOK CLUB: WHAT I CAN DO IN MY READING LOG?
ME & THE BOOK
Sometimes what I read about a character or an event makes me think of things in my own life. I can write in my log and tell about what the character or the event or other ideas made me think about from my own life.
PICTURES
Everytime I read, I end up with some kind of picture in my head about the story, if I just think about parts I like. I can draw in my log and share my picture with the group. I have to remember that when I draw a picture, I need to write a little about why I drew it so that I can remember where the picture came from, what made me think about it, and why I wanted to draw it.
SEQUENCES
Sometimes events in the book might be important to remember the order they happened. I can make a sequence chart in my log and share it with my group, explaining why I thought it would be important to remember.
AUTHOR'S CRAFTS AND SPECIAL TRICKS
Sometimes authors use special words, paint pictures in my mind with words, make me wish I could write like they do, use funny language, write dialogue that is really good, and many other things. In my log, I can write examples of special things the author did to make me like his story.

Figure 8. Reading log activity map.

experienced a lack of ideas. They gave one to each student to place in the front of his or her reading log.

Discussion. Discussion formed the essence of the intervention and included both Community Share and Book Clubs. Community Share, a term we borrowed from the literature on process writing, describes the large-group discussions particularly useful in two circumstances: (a) raising students' awareness about what they would be reading, and (b) providing a place for students to share what they had discussed in their Book Club and to learn from each other. Furthermore, through these large-group discussions, teachers could see where gaps in students' knowledge may exist (e.g., attributing World War II to a problem about oil rights in the desert, a belief that coincided with events in the Persian Gulf).

Book Clubs were small student-led discussion groups including three to six students. Participation varied from teacher-assigned to student-selected groups, always with a heterogenous mix of students. Roles such as facilitator or mediator were not assigned but emerged in the Book Clubs. Students generally began by sharing their written responses from their reading logs, using them as starting points for broader discussions.

Instruction. Instruction was a crucial fourth component, focusing on *what* and *how* to share. *What to share* included modeling various rhetorical (e.g., text structure, story elements), comprehension (e.g., question-asking, drawing upon prior knowledge and related texts, mapping), and synthesis (e.g., overarching themes, time lines) activities with the whole group. The examples illustrated in the description of reading logs and think-sheets provide a window into the many different activities and ways of thinking that were modeled. For example, students learned to focus on characters when they were taught to use mapping strategies to describe different characters in depth. In their subsequent Book Clubs, they also had an opportunity to see how their peers focused on similar and different character traits. In modeling how to critique a book, Deb and Laura helped students acquire the ability to articulate their own preferences and concerns about books as they wrote and later discussed their ideas.

For *how to share*, instruction focused on both general interactions, such as taking turns and listening to each other, and specific interactions, including asking follow-up questions, asking for clarification, or relating comments to ideas raised by another student during discussion. Students watched and critiqued audio- and videotaped Book Clubs as well as written transcripts. Deb found it useful at the end of many Book Club sessions to select an audiotape at random and play back a few minutes of the students' discussion.[4] After students had listened, they offered comments first about what the group had done particularly well, then about things that might be improved. Students grew increasingly aware of appropriate ways to interact. In fact, one day after Deb selected Jeffrey's Book Club's tape, but before she began to play it, Jeffrey volunteered, "I know, I know, I talked too much in the group today. I hardly let anyone else speak. I'm sorry." Interestingly, while Deb was careful to insist that students not critique each other by name, the students themselves were quite willing to volunteer their analyses of their own behaviors.

Laura found that the typed transcripts of individual Book Clubs were very useful for her students' critiquing their Book Clubs. She occasionally pulled transcripts from various points in the year; changed students' names to "Student 1," "Student 2," and so forth; and had them reenact the Book Club, almost as a play. Students then discussed how they felt in each of the parts, while as a group they critiqued the overall success of the Book Clubs. This gave students a chance to "walk in the shoes" of a quiet student, a student showing leadership, one who might interrupt a lot, and so forth.

All four components--reading, writing, discussion (Book Club and Community Share), and instruction--were present each day, though the amount of time in each varied considerably depending upon the text, the previous day's activities, the time in the academic year, and the

---

[4] Because of the nature of the data collection, several groups taped their Book Club discussions each day. Some of the tapes were later transcribed, while others were only listened to by students without further transcription or analysis. Usually, two to four groups were audiotaped each day.

goals for the particular day. Laura and Deb led most of the instruction in their own classrooms, while other members of the research team observed and took field notes two to four days a week over the course of the year. Data sources included the following: (a) student reading logs, (b) transcripts, (c) audio- and videotaped instruction and discussion, (d) field notes, and (e) teachers' comments and interviews. Students became active members of the research team as well, willingly participating in interviews, volunteering to save writing samples for us, and labeling their group's audiotapes on a daily basis. Two students, even began to keep occasional field notes, as one of them noted, "when someone says something important that I think we should remember."

Accountability in Book Club

Accountability became an issue as the first report card period drew to a close and Laura and Deb were faced with assigning grades to the students. Since early fall, they had maintained portfolios of all students' Book Club work (i.e., reading logs, compare/contrast papers, and synthesis think-sheets) using hanging folders for each student. The students' papers showed evidence of progress and both teachers found these materials helpful as they attempted to evaluate the skills and strategies taught during Book Club. However, they found the district's focus on letter grades insufficient for communicating to parents the specifics of students' progress and needs. They brought this to the attention of the building principal, who approved the development of a strategy checklist which allowed them to be very specific about the reading abilities they wanted to focus on (see Figure 9). On the report card, Laura and Deb indicated that parents should "see attached" in place of writing a letter grade.

The strategy checklist included four sections. In the first, strategies were listed that illustrated the intersection between those strategies taught within Book Club and those that appeared on the scope and sequence chart for Grades 4 and 5 of the district adopted basal reading series. Thus, there were clear links drawn between what Deb and Laura were teaching and the instruction present in those classrooms using the basal reading series. The second section

Reading Abilities Checklist

Students' Name_____

Teacher's Signature

_____

Strategies	1	2	3	4
Predicting				
Sequencing				
Organizing				
Representation				
Identifying Important Ideas				
Refining/Revising				
Drawing Conclusions				

Comprehension	1	2	3	4
Recognizes story themes				
Recognizes purpose				
Synthesizes information across text(s)				

Expressive Abilities: ORAL	1	2	3	4
Evaluates text using specific ideas				
Ideas are expressed clearly				

Expressive Abilities: Written	1	2	3	4
Evaluates text using specific ideas				
Ideas are expressed clearly				

Comments: First Grading Period

Comments: Second Grading Period

Comments: Third Grading Period

Comments: Fourth Grading Period

Key:
- Excellent
- ✓ Satisfactory
- \- Needs Improvement

Figure 9. Checklist alternative for district report card.

focused specifically on students' comprehension at a more holistic level: comprehension of the story's central theme, author's purpose, and students' ability to integrate across the different selections they had read. In the other two sections, students' expressive abilities in written and oral contexts were evaluated. In addition to the four sections of the checklist, Deb and Laura felt they wanted a place to write more open-ended remarks each grading period, and this space is shown on the right half of the page.

The first parent-teacher conference in October provided both teachers an opportunity to show parents their student's portfolio, including both the reading logs and think-sheets, and to explain the student's progress as reflected on the checklist. Parents generally appreciated the details of their student's progress, as reflected in the checklist, with many commenting that it clarified the skills the program covered. Both Deb and Laura continued to use these materials all year, feeling confident that they assessed students' progress in reading, and both expect to use them again next year.

What Have We Learned?

To address our overall question, How successful was Book Club as a literacy instruction environment? we focused on a number of related questions that seemed fundamental to understanding the nature of our findings. We explored the nature of classroom talk, students' perceptions about their Book Club experiences, relationships among the components, and nontraditional learners' experiences with Book Club.

What Is the Nature of Classroom Talk About Text?

One of our goals was to understand better what students chose to talk about, given the opportunity to discuss books without an adult facilitator. To explore this, we have transcribed approximately two Book Club sessions per week from units about World War II/Japan, folktales, World War II/Europe, and biographies. The content of the Book Club discussions, or *what* the students shared, are being analyzed to determine the purposes of the discussions and the range included within each session (see also Gilles's, 1990, description of the various ways talk was used by her elementary students during their literature group discussions).

Preliminary analysis reveals that students engage in talk for at least nine different purposes: (1) sharing written responses from the reading logs, (2) clarifying points of confusion, (3) discussing the main theme of their selections, (4) relating to previously read texts, (5) critiquing what author's had done well or needed to improve, (6) identifying authors purposes, (7), discussing the process of response or discussion, (8) relating text ideas to personal experiences or feelings, and (9) relating to prior knowledge. We discuss each in turn below.

Share written responses from reading logs. Students brought their reading logs to their Book Club groups and often referred to their notes during the discussion. Many of the initial Book Clubs, and occasional ones throughout the year, were characterized by children taking turns reading from their logs without significant interaction. The segment below from an early December Book Club about *The Painter and the Wild Swans* (Clement, 1986) illustrates both what was shared and the students' awareness of their approach.

> Angela: I would like to share about the book [reads from reading log]. "The book was nice. I like it very much but at the end when a swan turns into, when Teiji turns into a swan, I wonder how he did turn into a swan when he was a person and I like when he was thinking of the swans at the end when he said 'I'm going to find my brother.' At the beginning I like when he was painting and saw the swan. I think he was going to paint a picture of a swan and then go look for them. And they [inaudible]. I like the book, the end."
>
> Jason: I am going to be reading in my reading log.
>
> Richard: So did the rest of us.

Angela followed the pattern set by the two previous students, simply reading the log exactly as written. As Jason and Richard note, they were consciously using this pattern and evidently saw no reason to change at this point.

To clarify points of confusion. Students turned to their peers if they were confused by segments of a selection or words used by the author. For example, the following discussion took place in early December in the same Book Club that had begun with merely sharing what students had written in their logs. Jason indicated his point of confusion by the end of the story.

Jason: I'm going to talk about the end because I don't know if he died.

Angela: He did.

Monte: [interrupting] He did die, his veins are froze, but then he made it out of the water, but then he sat there so long when it started snowing and all that, that it all covered him up. But then through his reflection in the water, it was still his body, but when you looked at him without the reflection, his normal thing, it looked like, like he had swan feather.

Jason: Was he a swan?

Monte: Yes

Richard: I want to know why he . . .

What began as turn taking to read aloud from their logs ended with a clarification exchange, a typical process seen in most Book Clubs as students grew more experienced.

To discuss the main theme of a story/text. Often students used their Book Clubs as a way to share their ideas about what was important in the selection they had read. For example, the theme of war quickly emerged after reading *The Wall* (Bunting, 1990). During a discussion, the students initiated their talk around this theme.

Angela: I like to talk about war. It is bad and some people may be angry for them to go to war/um.

Jeffrey: So what do you think about that? Do you think they should go to war?

Angela: No.

Jeffrey: Do you think war is a bad thing and shouldn't happen?

Angela: Yes.

Jeffrey: What about you, Jean?

Jean: I think war is scary because my cousins are there, people are there, people are there.

Jeffrey: Okay, so what do you mean?

Jean: My cousins are in war. Other people's families are there.

Tremaine: Sometime what we can do from the conflict so that people couldn't die what we can do is pray every night so that nobody would die.

Similarly, during a discussion of a short selection, "Will Rogers and the Power of Humor" (Hand, 1990), during the biography unit, students in several Book Clubs discussed how Will Rogers had used humor to enhance people's lives.

To relate to other texts. Book Club discussions provided an opportunity for students to relate ideas from the current selection to those from previously read books. The following discussion occurred after students had read two versions of a folktale, *The Weaving of a Dream* (Heyer, 1986) and *Enchanted Tapestry* (San Souci, 1987). Prior to coming to Book Club, they had written about similarities and differences in the two versions in their reading logs. Crystal introduced the idea of the similarities between the books.

Crystal: I would say most of it was the same as *Weaving a Dream* [*sic*]. They told almost everything just like the other story. The characters were the same, except for the names. It was a good book. It was almost, almost the same.

Eva: What do you mean by "it was almost the same"?

Crystal: *Weaving the Dream* was almost the same as the *Enchanting Tapestry* [*sic*], um the other book had a cover right . . . all the . . . [pauses]

Leanne: [jumping in] . . . Do you think the same person that wrote that book wrote this? I don't really think so.

Crystal: I don't think so either . . . [overlapping speech]

Leanne: [overlapping speech] . . . I think something should be done about . . .

Eva: [Interrupting] It's like a different story, the same story but different people brought it up and made just part of different stuff in it

Leanne: Do you think, Crystal, the author of *Weaving of a Dream* knows about this?

Crystal: I think so, yeah,

Leanne: Do you think he's mad?

Eva: Do you think this book was good?

Crystal: Yes!

Leanne: I thought *Weaving of a Dream* was a good book, so I must think this is a good book.

The links across the two texts made by these children reflects those of more mature readers (e.g., Hartman, 1991). The children focus on specific similarities between the two selections using examples from both folktales. Further, they explore a dilemma underlying what they apparently view as copying. Because these were both folktales, born of an oral tradition, it is possible that the students had difficulty understanding how such similar plots could evolve unless one of the authors had "copied" from the other.

To critique the author's success. Book Club allowed students to critique the books they had read. This purpose usually could be linked to the times students had either been asked or elected to critique the story in their logs or think-sheets, such as Randy's displayed in Figure 5. They often talked in terms of what had been modeled on the think-sheet, what the author had done well, and what the author might have done to improve the selection. For example, after reading *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* (Coerr, 1977), students discussed how well the author had told the story of Sadako and how much she had made Sadako real to them. Yet, many were critical of a lack of information about other family members (e.g., needed to tell more about the grandmother, explain how her brother felt when he learned his sister was dying) and World War II.

To identify author's purposes. Students used Book Clubs to discuss why an author had written a particular story. For example, many students talked about the author's purpose in writing *My Hiroshima* (Morimoto, 1987), a nonfiction selection about the day the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. The author at the end explicitly describes her desire to have children know about the horrors of war, since her own society had tended to value and associate honor with fighting. This thought intrigued the students who felt that such ideas apply even to their own playground activities and the importance of getting along.

To discuss the process of response. Often a brief exchange between two students focused on the process of response itself. This included brief exchanges about how students should use their logs to share a particular kind of idea or who should have a turn to speak. While

discussing *The Painter and the Wild Swans*, one group started to monitor whether they were remaining on task:

Richard: What are we talking about this for, we're supposed to be talking about the story.

Angela: We ARE!

Richard: Oh, rowboats are really in the story.

Monte: They are!

Angela: They are!

Richard: Okay, they are but we aren't supposed to be talking about them.

Monte: We are supposed to be talking about the part where he dies.

To relate ideas from the text to personal experiences or feelings. A powerful role of the Book Club was to provide a small group forum for students to share personal feelings and experiences. One such Book Club followed the reading of *The Wall* (Bunting, 1990), a story of a father and son finding the grandfather's name on the Vietnam War memorial. Mei was a student who had arrived the previous year via Thailand and New York from Vietnam. After this story, she was involved in an exchange that drew heavily on her personal and her family's experience. This discussion occurred in January, on the eve of the Persian Gulf War, so the issue of war was in the minds of many of the students. After briefly talking about relatives going to war, Leanne introduced the next topic.

Eva: Joshua, do you have any relatives that have gone to war?

Joshua: No

Eva: Have any of your friends had relatives that have gone to war?

Joshua: [inaudible]

Leanne: I don't think war is really necessary, letting people die and get killed and everything, there are some things that can just be talked out

Helena: I agree

Mei: I think about the war too, the people

Helena: That's because you've been through a lot. In Vietnam you went through a lot. Did you used to cry a lot when it happened?

Mei: Yeah, I was, uh, scared . . .

[inaudible exchange]

Helena: Did they kill a lot of children in Vietnam for that?

Mei: Some, um, some American guys? They come to Vietnam and they help us [pause]

Eva: Come out? Get out?

Helena: They helped you guys get out? Get out of Vietnam? That was very nice of them.

Mei: Yeah, and um, and some bad guys, they killed their place? They go, they, they go back to damn place again, because. American guys, they kill all of them, but, um, but they don't kill all of them. Um, bad guys are smart. They kill a lot of American guys. So they fight there. They tell them, have to give for them their money, when you get money, so have to give for them . . .

Helena: Oh, it's like, I see, it's sort of like here, we have to give them money for the war to begin . . . our taxes get raised because they need money for more nuclear bombs. So it's dumb. What do you think, Eva?

During this exchange, Mei, who was usually rather quiet, drew on her personal experiences related to Vietnam to contribute to the discussion of war. We frequently saw that though the themes or content of the Book Clubs were similar in relating to the books they had read, the specifics of the discussions across the Book Clubs usually varied as events or interactions triggered the students' memories.

To relate to prior knowledge. The last function that Book Club discussions served was similar to relating to feelings, but instead focused on relating to previous knowledge. For example, in a discussion at the end of March after reading *My Hiroshima*, a group of students considered what they knew about the day the bomb had been dropped. They drew upon a visit to the classroom by a Japanese American whose family was from Hiroshima. She had taught them how to make paper cranes and had described what had happened to her family on the day the bomb was dropped. Much of the knowledge they applied to interpreting the current selection

was based on what they had learned from their visitor. The following exchange between Helena and Jennifer reflects their co-construction of their memory of their visitor's role.

Jennifer: Remember that lady that Ms. Raphael brought in that we were to learn how to make paper cranes from? Remember she said that/um/her parents or something were in it? And one of her aunts or something died in it?

Helena: They were all, it had happened and they . . .

Jennifer: Yeah and they all waited in like about one house, you know, and then about two/two days later, the sister, the/um/one of the aunts/her aunt came back and all, and then, she said . . .

Helena: She said I want to see children [inaudible] and she die right there.

Jennifer: Yeah, I wanted/um/if that made her feel like no wonder her aunt died, and . . .

Helena: I bet . . . her very furious/furious with war//that everyone should be furious with war . . .

Jennifer: And remember she said that her dad used to bury/um/his/um . . .

Helena: Uncle's money [overlapping speech].

Jennifer: Money/money in the//and then she got that piece//remember she showed us that piece of all radiation that's stick like the glue//of like all the burn . . .

Helena: Mmm-hmmm.

Jennifer: That was cool.

Helena: And she also said the radiation spread real real fast . . .

We are continuing our analyses to examine whether these purposes remain constant or change over the course of the academic year; how changes relate to the selections' content, the reading log activities, and reader factors (e.g., group membership, students' interests); and the relationship between purposes defined in small-group discussion and those described by students in one-to-one conversation with an adult (e.g., Hickman, 1983).

What Are Students' Perceptions About Book Club?

To study students' perceptions and beliefs about Book Club, we created a context in which students would have reasons to talk about their experiences. We enlisted the help of Mary

VandenBosch, a student in the literacy master's degree program at Michigan State University who was familiar as a substitute teacher to the students. She explained that she would have her own classroom next year and was exploring ways to teach reading and that it would help her decide on her own teaching if they would talk about what they thought of their reading program and how they might wish to change it.

Mary asked the students to generate a semantic map of Book Club, listing what they thought was important, to be used in a later discussion about Book Club. The students' maps varied in complexity. Some of the more detailed maps listed superordinate concepts such as "ways to be good" with lines drawn to related subordinate concepts such as "you have to listen." The simpler maps had less concepts listed and did not use super- and subordinate relationships among the concepts. Though there were variations across all maps, three themes emerged: (1) connections among talking about books, reading books, writing responses, and sharing those responses (e.g., "talk about the characters," "write your feeling on paper and then you share them"); (2) kinds of behavior such as listening, questioning, sharing feelings, being honest, and "having a conversation" that promote exchanges of ideas; and (3) activities such as asking questions, character mapping, drawing, summarizing, or quoting from the literature that were appropriate to the reading log and later discussion.

Two maps, one by Laine and the other by Dolores, provide an interesting contrast in terms of students' focus. Laine's map (see Figure 10) emphasizes *what to share*, or those activities appropriate for determining the content of their Book Clubs. Dolores's map (see Figure 11) reflects a stronger emphasis on *how to share*. Laine's map includes reference to predicting the end of the story, talking about characters, favorite and least favorite story parts, and so forth. In addition, she notes the relationship among reading, writing, and discussion, as she describes the importance of taking notes and saying the part you like under the concept of telling about predictions. Other concepts included in Laine's map relate to evaluation, summary, character analysis, prediction, questioning, and affective response to the material. Overall, the emphasis

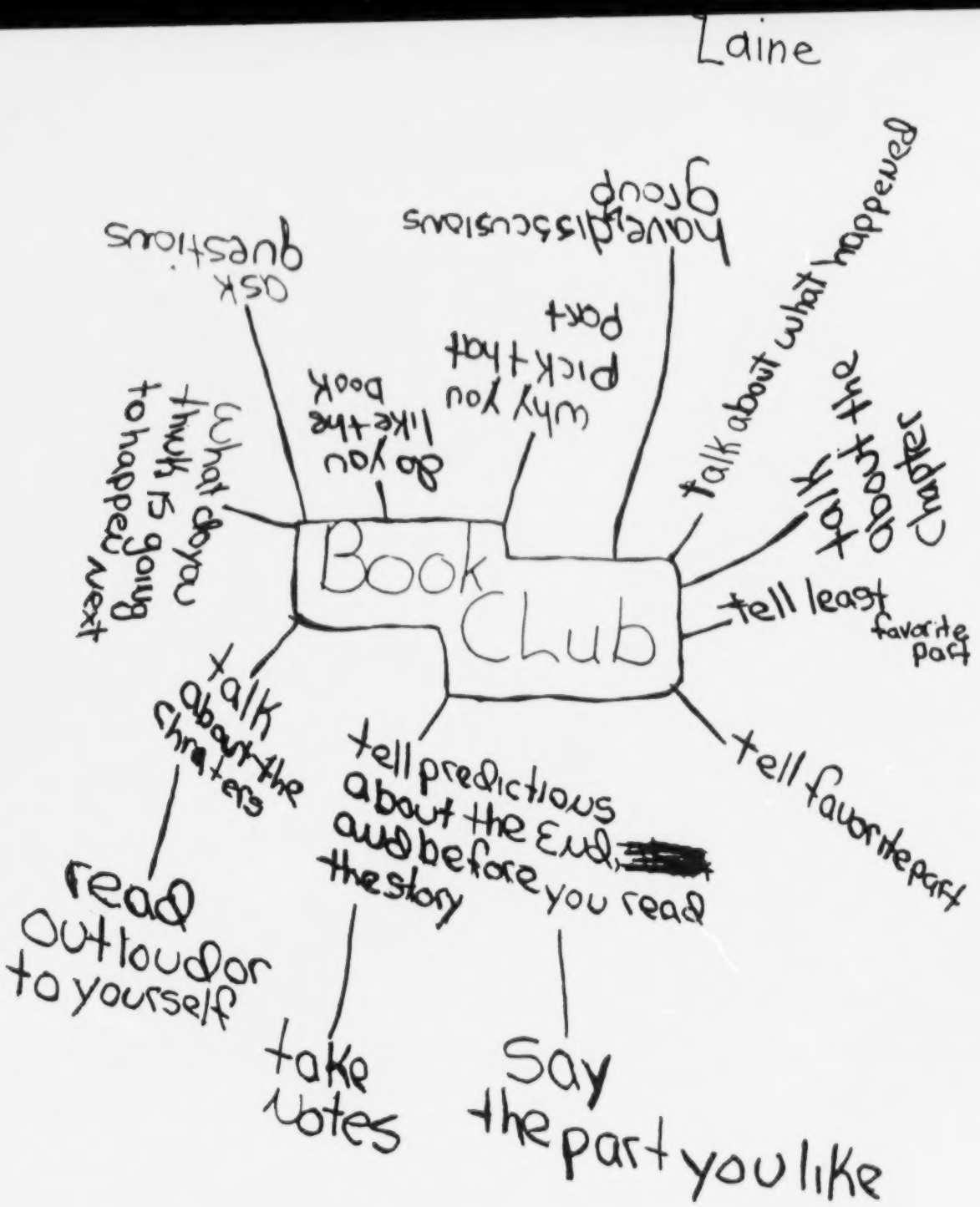
Laine
Book Club
ask questions
have discussions group
talk about what happened
talk about the chapter
tell least favorite part
tell favorite part
tell predictions about the End
and before you read the story
talk about the characters
read out loud or to yourself
take notes
say the part you like
what do you think is going to happen next
do you like the book
why you pick that part

Figure 10. Laine's map of Book Club.

Figure 11. Dolores's map of Book Club.

in Laine's map seems to be on *what* can be discussed during Book Club time. She does not make direct references to *how* these activities should take place.

In contrast, Dolores's map consists almost entirely of references to behaviors which promote "good" discussions. Her work also seems to indicate connections between language and response processes. She includes "tell them what you think of" as a subordinate concept to "read quietly." She connects "you learn" and "we have a serten time" under "we be writing down what we read." Dolores does appear to be more concerned with procedural considerations. She places "you have to listen" with "good," and "ask questions" with "don't be bad."

Dolores is a student whose academic work has placed her in low-ability groups in the past. Her descriptions of *what to share* are somewhat vague, mostly limited to the words "read" and "talk." But her map seems to indicate an understanding of subtle relationships between concepts related to *how to share*. While Dolores was initially observed in a group which showed very little interaction, during the two months prior to making this map she was a member of a group which had remained together throughout the semester because of their improved interaction abilities.

In the Book Club session led by Mary and prompted by her occasional probes (e.g., "So, tell me what you think I should understand about Book Club so I could use it next year"), the students were eager to share. The transcript revealed overlapping talk and a conversational tone, rather than more formal, school-like turn taking. Students described Book Club as a "place to read books and talk about them." One suggested that "you sum up paragraphs so you can talk about them," indicating that despite his close ties to the text, his purposes for summarizing were to share ideas rather than complete a school task. Another suggested that it was "a place where you can have some fun and talk about things that you'd never talk about with other people."

As the group continued, they discussed the turn-taking and questioning procedures:

Dolores: After somebody's done, you ask 'em a question.

Anita: But not "yes or no" questions.

Linda: You should ask 'em why, and because they liked the book.

Laine: You don't have to like, go in order, it should be like a free conversation, makes you feel good.

Linda: And you don't have to be shy or anything, 'cause they ain't gonna make you read what you wrote down. 'Cause at the beginning--we were starting to--at the beginning when--when we started the--when we started Book Club, we'd just start, we wouldn't really--we wouldn't really want to talk, but then when we got into it, we were talking more.

Anita: As you read the book.

Laine: 'Cause we felt better about Book Club. We got used to it.

Anita: Every time we'd read another chapter, you'd be thinking of the topic.

Dolores: It gets excitin' as you start reading, and you get towards the end, it's like, and you wanna know, you wanna know what comes next. And the teacher stops you from reading, and you're like "No! I wanna read more! I wanna read more!"

Linda: Like on a movie, where they . . . stop for a commercial.

Dolores: Yeah!

Anita: This is a part where you can read a book that you wanted.

Their perceptions appeared to relate to the different functions Book Club discussions served. For example, they indicated one purpose was comprehension, saying it "helps you read for understanding," or "You learn more things as you're going on." Another perceived purpose related to personal response, as two students stated, "[You] feel good about feelings," and "When you read a book you feel great about yourself, because you're happy that you have something to share with other people, they can understand it." Students also described opportunities to talk about relationships to the characters in the book. One student suggested, "Like you can put yourself into that position of that person in there," and a second responded, "You can relax and get the picture in your head and act like that's you, the main character."

Such written response and conversation supported our own perception that students were highly involved in many levels of literacy. They were concerned about their own comprehension and learning, yet saw value in going beyond merely understanding the words on the page. They

stressed the importance of sharing ideas, relating to the characters in the text, and being able to respond in a genuine way to the selections they read.

What Are the Interrelationships Among the Components?

In addition to the various purposes for which students participate in Book Club, we are analyzing the relationships among the four Book Club components through a series of studies Sue McMahon has conducted. First, Sue explored how reading and writing influenced discussion and vice versa (McMahon, 1991). Second, she examined how themes or patterns emerge through students' writing and oral discussions, using three responses to selections related to World War II and Japan (McMahon, Pardo, & Raphael, in press). Third, she looked at the relationship between instruction and the nature of the students' response in the reading logs and their Book Club groups (McMahon, in progress).

Findings of the first study involved analysis of the students' reading logs and transcripts of their Book Club meetings. Using a case study approach, Sue traced Bart's, a fifth-grade student's, written and oral discourse during the unit about World War II and Japan. Bart began the literature unit with an illustration of a carnival in Hiroshima being bombed. During the subsequent Book Club with his peers, he used humor to convey the events of the bombing with people falling off a high ferris wheel and splattering to the ground. His peers laughed and focused their entire discussion around their amusement over his comments. As Bart and his peers continued to read books about the effects of war, their log entries and comments during Book Club began to reflect a more serious attitude toward war. In a session shortly after the one described, one of his peers told Bart that his drawing and description of the carnival was "bogue," expressing criticism about his cavalier attitude about war. This and other similar comments during Book Club gradually influenced Bart's thinking.

Bart's thoughts about war had become more serious as he read about characters whose lives were ruined by war. The oral discussions about these issues influenced the way he represented ideas about death and dying, as well as how he talked about war. His representations later in the unit included a depiction of Sadako's funeral with her parents crying and placing bowls of rice

and egg rolls on her coffin. He explained that these were her favorite foods and he thought she would have liked that. Toward the end of the unit, after reading two additional books on the same theme, he argued the following in Book Club, "When the radiation bomb hit . . . when the bomb hit, Americans had no right to do that. I don't think they shoulda done that . . . Radiation kills a lot of people. How would they like it? They wouldn't like it *one* bit."

In the second study, Sue analyzed Bart's log entries and traced his comments during Book Club in terms of emergent themes or patterns of discussion. Three consistent themes were evident: (1) a changing view of war, (2) the influence of Bart's own prior knowledge and interest in response to text, and (3) a gender influence on his reading.

The changing perspective on war can be seen in the brief examples above. His interest in World War II and Japan could also be traced to his own prior knowledge and background. Bart was of partially Japanese heritage, his mother's mother being from Japan. He had recently been to Japan to visit his homeland and family that still lived there. Thus, he often raised issues related to Japanese culture and tradition in both his logs and later discussion groups. Finally, on several occasions his preference for strong male characters emerged in discussion, whether asking for more information about Sadako's brother, identifying a nonexistent grandfather as a character instead of the grandmother, or identifying the story's author as a male, despite several references to "her" in Community Share and Book Club discussions. These themes continued to emerge as Bart read books with related settings and plots, recorded his reactions in his log, and discussed ideas in his Book Club and Community Share. The maturity and consistency of student-generated themes in their discussions is particularly noteworthy.

The third study demonstrated a strong connection between log entries, discussions, and instruction. As a literature-based reading program, instruction integrated both aesthetic and efferent responses, as well as various skills and strategies associated with meaning. For example, instruction might focus on the skill of predicting upcoming events with an assignment directing students to record and share predictions in their Book Club. On another day, instruction might encourage students to reflect in their logs and Book Clubs how the reading

experience affected each student. Teacher modeling of particular types of response resulted in students' adoption of one or more of the modeled examples. When instruction focused on broad personal issues of reader response, discussions and written response were more broad based and personal. When instruction focused on comprehension strategies (e.g., prediction) students were more likely to merely work to identify the "correct" message in the text. Together, this line of research provides a basis for understanding the nature of the interactions among the Book Club intervention's components.

How Can Book Club Be Extended to Other Populations?

The Book Clubs in Laura's and Deb's classrooms provided important insights into the development of literature-based instruction in mainstream classrooms, but did not address how such work can be extended to nontraditional learners whose current instruction is often more extreme in its emphasis on discrete skills. Thus, two studies were conducted with nontraditional learners. Ginny Goatley began Book Club with a group of learning-disabled students who receive their reading instruction in a special education classroom, while Fenice Boyd worked with a group of 16 high school students in a remedial reading class. Both explored the nature of students' discussions and potential inhibitors to their participation in reading, writing, and discussion related to Book Clubs.

Ginny's group consisted of five students (one third grader, three fourth graders, and one fifth grader), documented as either LD or EMI in reading and/or writing, for whom Book Club was their first experience with literature-based reading instruction and student-led discussion groups. The students' reading program had been primarily focused on sound/symbols relationships. When connected text was read, the focus was on fluency and ability to answer related comprehension questions. Introducing this group of students to Book Club parallelled that in the regular education classrooms, and the effects were seen in the nature of their questions and in authentic discussions in which students listened and responded to each other. Like the students in the regular education pilot, these students showed problems with both *what to share* and *how to share*. For discussion of the story's content, the students often drew from

literal information in the text (e.g., asking the name or age of a character or for the retelling of specific story events). Initial problems in both *what* and *how* to share are seen in the following example of a discussion after reading Delton's (1974) *Two Good Friends*:

Cheryl: Why did the Duck go to the Bear's house?

Hilary: What did they do together?

Robert: They/um

Kaitlin: [interrupting] Why did the Bear make cupcakes?

Robert: What I don't know . . .

The students showed an awareness of the importance of asking questions; however, they did not respond to one another. Their initial discussions did not show much depth of response, relation to personal experiences, or awareness of a main theme.

As part of their Book Club activities, Ginny's group of students met twice a week for six weeks, once a week for the next four weeks, then daily for the final two weeks. During this time they wrote frequently and eventually daily, learning ways to organize their thoughts and ideas, developing character maps, sequence charts, and book critiques; and generating questions. The effect of the activities and related instruction could be seen in their growth in ability to discuss the books in meaningful ways. Within the three-month period, their discussions reflected many of the same purposes as those of the regular education students, but using less sophisticated selections. Rather than merely reading their logs to each other without comment, they asked for clarification, expressed feelings, and related ideas from the book to their personal experiences. The following discussion, approximately six weeks later, followed reading and writing about Rabe's (1981) *The Balancing Girl*, about a young girl in a wheelchair:

Hilary: How do you think she sits?

Robert: In a wheelchair like she usually do.

Kaitlin: She has to sit like this [demonstrates a straight back]. Does she like being handicapped?

Hilary: No. 'Cause she wants to get out of the wheelchair sometimes.

Kaitlin: Well, she must/she can get this one it's in the back/'cause my cousin has one. He is handicapped and he sets down and presses a button and he slides down on the couch so he can sit down.

Notice the students interact with each other, answer questions, relate the text to prior experiences, clarify confusing areas, and identify the handicapped theme of the text.

In addition to their improved discussions, students discussed the purposes of Book Club, sharing perceptions after a mapping activity similar to that engaged in with the regular education students. Kaitlin told the group, "If you come to Book Club on the first day you get scared and you don't know what to do or anything and when you get used to it, it's getting funner." Most students indicated that Book Club meant reading, writing, talking about books, sharing ideas, listening to each other, and asking and answering questions. Changes in their discussions and perceptions about reading suggest the benefits of implementing literacy instruction with authentic literature and in meaningful contexts regardless of labeled abilities.

Nowhere was the importance of beginning early with nontraditional learners more obvious than in the high school developmental reading group with which Fenice worked. Her 16 students, a heterogeneous mix of abilities (i.e., Grade 3 to grade level), were in a rural high school. Their program was typical of study skills, isolated practice in reading skills associated with comprehension (e.g., identifying main ideas, sequencing). The Book Club Project afforded them with the opportunity to read and discuss a novel and to embed any comprehension activities within the context of preparing for their Book Club discussion.

Analysis of the field notes, transcripts, and student logs points to the difficulty of making significant changes in the patterns of teaching and learning that students have become accustomed to experiencing. The students' previous experiences seemed particularly influential as they met in their Book Clubs. They were not used to working in collaborative groups and they resisted open-ended written response, indicating they would prefer to fill in the blank or select the correct answer to multiple-choice questions. They also resisted the opportunities to engage in discourse about the novel. They seemed to believe that what they had to say was not

significant. In short, they seemed to reflect the result of years of "remedial" efforts as described by Allington (1983) and more recently by McGill-Frazen and Allington (1990).

Similar to both the general education and younger nontraditional learners, the secondary students showed initial difficulty in *what* and *how* to share. The students' looked to the teacher as the authority, the one who has "the right answer," or they looked to the text for the right answer. These practices of text as authority are issues which confront both regular and remedial educators. According to Bernhardt (1987), textbooks may be perceived as authoritative objects. What tends to happen is that students view textbooks as a representation of knowledge or truth. Coupled with this notion is that of the teacher as the next best authority on textbook knowledge. In such an objectivist perspective, students find it difficult to understand that their own knowledge is relative or that it counts as knowledge within a given context.

The secondary students, Deidra, Kathy, Sylvia, and Mark, looked to Fenice for answers when she listened to their Book Club discussions. Occasionally, Fenice contributed to their discussions in an effort to get then to think about what they said or how it might be looked upon from a different perspective. An example of a discussion which showed need for instruction in *what* to share occurred as follows:

Fenice:	O.K. Whenever you're ready to start.
[Note:	28 seconds lapse before a student finally says something. They were looking at each other and Fenice.]
Kathy:	What are we gonna talk about?
Deidra:	What do we talk about?
Fenice:	What you wrote down in your reading log.
Kathy:	I ain't got nothin'.
Student:	You do it.
Student:	Go first.

[Note: 10 seconds lapse before a student says anything.]

Mark: Hi. My name is Mark.

This transcript shows the very beginning of a Book Club discussion. Fenice began by saying to the students that they could start discussing the issues that they should have written down prior to this Book Club whenever they liked. There was a time lapse of 28 seconds. Though this may not seem like a lot of time, when there is silence among students and the teacher is looking down at her papers writing, 28 seconds seems eternal. The first question raised by one student in this Book Club was, "What are we supposed to talk about?" The question was asked after students had an opportunity to read a section of the novel and write down in their reading logs what they liked or disliked about a character. Students also had time to think about the issues that they raised in their reading logs. They even had an opportunity to talk about what they were writing before getting into Book Club. With all that as a prerequisite to their discussion, the 28-second pause followed by the question, "What are we supposed to talk about?" is interesting.

To wait several seconds and then ask the teacher what should be discussed is to perceive the teacher as an authority in several different ways. Although the students had been given direction as to what they should do in order to prepare for their Book Club discussion, they showed expectations of hearing a lecture or a summary of events in the chapter read in the novel. Book Club aims at letting the students initiate the discussion based on issues they perceived to be significant and relevant. Issues that are raised by teachers may be different from those students raise. When teachers set the agenda for a discussion, the discussion will naturally tend to take a different slant. Ultimately, students tend to feed back bits of information from the text to the teacher. Not only are students influenced by what the author of the text wrote, they are also influenced by teachers' interpretations of what the author of the text wrote. This becomes problematic in the sense that students do not articulate their own thinking when they look to the teacher and the text as a means for initiating Book Club discussions. Without analytical interaction between the teacher and students, students merely go through the process of making sense of the text through the teachers' eyes.

In analyzing the students' talk about *what* to share, we noticed that the discourse focused on literal recall of information. The information that students attempted to use from the novel for their group discussions was presented as a summary instead of a discussion of their issues. It appeared that students had learned far too well how to focus on a right answer. Unfortunately, such level of discourse about text becomes the frame through which these students interpret and define literacy.

In the discussion about *Charlie Pippin* (Boyd, 1990) that follows, Ava, Regina, and Mary discuss how they felt about a story's main character, Charlie. Fenice participated occasionally when it appeared the "discussion" had stopped. Notice that the Book Club discussion essentially is a literal recall of information, restating and paraphrasing specific conflicts that happened in the story. Each students' stated impression of the character was actually a recounting of an explicit incident that occurred in the first chapter of the novel.

Ava: Charlie, and I liked about her was she wanted to learn about her father . . . father in the war and her attitude and dislike, I didn't . . . didn't really dislike anything about her. What I put down is . . . what I liked about the story is, ah-um she is proud of what her father [inaudible] on page 12-13, paragraph 10; do you want me to read it?

Fenice: On page what?

Ava: 12 to 13 and paragraph 10.

Ava: O.K.

Regina: O.K. Ah-um, I'm Regina, and [pause] my character was Charlie and I like, I disliked her attitude because at times she was . . . she was too mouthy and stuff. And I like, and I like how she stood up for the way she felt; like um she wouldn't take anything; she wouldn't like let people push her around; and I thought it was interesting how she wanted to learn more about the war and that she was so concerned about what her father went through and why her father wouldn't talk about it and stuff and she wanted to like learn more about it; and I thought it was interesting when she like sold stuff at school and cause, I think it's kinda funny thought because, because that's how she [inaudible].

Mary: I'm Mary and I put Charlie because she was kinda funny but she was um; I thought she wants to learn about her father and the war and I don't like her attitude because she is snobbier [than everyone else?] and um the part I like about the story was um [pause] when she was making the [pause] origami things and um class and she got caught and

[teacher and stuff?] and that she was acting like she wasn't doing anything wrong.

Fenice: What page is that on Missy? You like . . . you thought . . . that's the special story part that you like? Is that what you're saying?

Mary: I guess. Um, um page four. Yeah, three and four.

Fenice: O.K. Now you go back around and . . . this is a discussion, remember?

Mary: You said the date didn't ya?

Ava: It's April 29th, 1991.

[Long pause]

Fenice: O.K. Ava?

Ava: What? You want me to tell you what . . . ?

Fenice: This should be a pretty interesting discussion because you liked her [Charlie's] attitude, you disliked her attitude, and you disliked her attitude. That's two against one. So . . .

Each student in this Book Club said that she liked or disliked the main character, Charlie. Ava liked Charlie because of her attitude. Regina and Mary disliked Charlie's attitude because she was "mouthy" and snobby.

This transcript reflects the difficulties students face when their experiences with literacy have not allowed them to become involved in discourse that is centered around what they read. The consistent exposure of literacy as practice in skills and drills, in which they have participated for several years, continues to be a strong influence. Consequently, what these students have come to know as literacy is based upon their experiences with reading and writing in "remedial" reading labs. Within those parameters, students use what they know as literacy to make sense of the text they read.

When students are placed in traditional remedial reading tracks year after year, they are inundated with an implicit definition of literacy in which literacy acquisition entails practicing skills in isolation, summarizing as a means of discussion, perceiving the teacher and text as the authority in literacy acquisition, and the reluctance to offer others the benefit of their interpretations and expertise. Comprehending and analytically responding to what they read is

difficult for students. Similarly, when teachers attempt to help students change their conceptions of literacy acquisition, the task is equally hard for them.

The use of Book Club with nontraditional learners, at both the elementary and secondary levels, shows the literacy practices that students observe and learn are significant. Literacy activities are not easily transformed when different literacy environments are introduced. While the experiences are transformed into a different social context, literacy instruction changes. But at the same time, students' conceptions of literacy remain the same. Instead of viewing reading as the dynamic interaction of reader, text, and the context of instruction, students believe that reading is synonymous with decoding, summary, and feeding back information. Undoubtedly, this belief about literacy can be accredited to an emphasis on a bottom-up or subskills approach to teaching reading and writing, not on understanding the meaning of the text (Palincsar & Brown, 1988).

Closing Comments

The opportunities afforded by the Book Club Project to learn about the nature of literature-based reading instruction and related issues and concerns have been numerous. We have begun to better understand the nature of classroom talk about literature; the interrelationships among reading, writing, and discussion; students' perceptions of reading instruction and particularly the role of literature response groups; and issues to consider as we work with students in nontraditional settings. However, like most research projects, our search for "answers" has rewarded us with far more questions than certainties. Perhaps the most important result from the studies to date is the information we have learned about students' understandings about literacy. As Mei described in a letter to the author of one of the books she had read, ". . .and we learn how to talk about this story and think about the story." Reading has become more than a place to read silently, say all the words right, and correctly answer the questions.

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